Shelley

Oliver Elton

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SHELLEY

BY

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NOTE

This essay is a chapter, revised here for separate issue, from the writer's *Survey of English Literature, 1780-1830*, first published in 1912. A chronological table and a brief note on the literature of the subject are appended.

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SHELLEY

I

View of the devil's advocate—Shelley one of the English prophets—Competing impulses of his genius—Relation to Wordsworth—Early pieces—*Queen Mab* and *Dæmon of the World.*

It has always been easy to make the case against Shelley and to reproach him for not giving us what we have no business to ask of him. He appears to dream of a world where nothing is amusing and where mankind as we know it does not exist. He makes us want to go and look at a Rembrandt portrait to reassure ourselves. He knew himself what he could not, or thought that he could not, do; and said that we must not go to 'a gin-shop' for 'a leg of mutton.' There is a streak in him that could be called womanish, only that we do not find the like in women. His high-pitched complaint and invective often irritate; and his dazzling, shifting imagery dissatisfies those who demand clear form and outline. It requires some effort, except

for his idolaters, to breathe in his atmosphere at all. The devil's advocate may be left to multiply these objections.

They are, as may be shown hereafter, exaggerated. But even were they all true, Shelley has his place, apart and secure, amongst the English prophets, in the great line from King Alfred to Carlyle. He has a clear and sublime vision of the hopes of humankind. He wishes to see the world freed from all the enslavements of the brain, and from the sloth that besets the heart and imagination. He imagines an age of mental light, with the law of love and beauty for its principle. To this vision of a regenerate earth he comes by many paths. The revolutionary doctrine of his day counts for much; but his study of Plato leads him in the same direction; and his reading of the character of Christ, apparent in *Prometheus Unbound*, is also a powerful influence. He ignores many things close at hand, but no man sees the stars clearer, and he is the most religious of men. Yet, were this all, he might not concern the history of letters.

He is an artist as well as a prophet. He does not, like so many, keep his second-best form for his highest ideas, and his most perfect form for his second-best ideas. He is more constantly a poet than any Englishman of the idealizing type,

except possibly Spenser; and his teaching is rarer and more inspiring than Spenser's, while his style is not less instinctively right and lovely. He is much more constantly a poet than Wordsworth; this is not to say that he is a greater one. But he leaves the impression, more than anyone between Blake and Swinburne, that he could not help being a poet. Even Keats does not suggest this so strongly, although his final achievement is as great as Shelley's; for in Keats it is long before we lose the feeling of effort and experiment. Shelley, too, has his phase of experiment, but once it is over he is seldom unpoetical.

But he is not an artist only when he is a prophet. Much of his best verse is quite foreign to his creed. It is not 'prophetic' at all—if the term be used to imply, not that 'didactic' writing which he tells us is his 'abhorrence,' but the transfiguring power of the imagination upon religious and moral ideas. He is not only the poet of ideal love, of freedom triumphant, and of the reign of justice upon earth. Verses like *Mutability* and the *Stanzas Written in Dejection* reveal a primitive melancholy and elemental remoteness which perhaps lie deeper in him than all his aspirations and philanthropies. Or we can call this, if we please, the other Shelley; and imagine

in him the kind of dualism which is present in us all though we cannot put it into song. Both sides of it can be traced, in more or less separate development. The apostolic vision has its own history, from *Alastor* to *Prometheus Unbound* and *Hellas*. The 'other' Shelley can be traced also, from the date of his first really piercing and individual lyric ('Away, the moor is dark beneath the moon') to his last poems, such as 'When the lamp is shattered' and the *Magnetic Lady to her Patient*. These opposing moods, or themes, appear in turn, kaleidoscopically, in the lyrics; they clash and fall into confusion, in *Laon and Cythna*; and once at least, in the *Lines Written among the Euganean Hills*, they coalesce in a wonderful harmony, which too soon is lost again. The course of Shelley's genius may be regarded as an effort to attain this coalescence, and to find a form that should express at once all he dreamed of for humanity, and all he knew about himself. Cut off at twenty-nine, he hardly achieved this; but a sort of race between these competing impulses can be traced in his poetic progress.

Still, Shelley's mind is not to be packed into a formula. For, first of all, his mood of dejection and solitariness is often simply one of revulsion; an ebb of his high tide of hope, that leaves the foreshore for a time blank and the rocks gaunt

and bare. It has this character, no doubt, in *Alastor*, where it is the inevitable cry of a young faith in its hour of disappointment. But this is not always, or generally, its character; and the poems where Shelley wails like a disembodied spirit, or pines to be one with the west wind or to perish away like odours or music, express, not a revulsion from anything, but rather something innate and temperamental; the voice, as it were, of those very winds and odours themselves, could we fancy them to have consciousness. Nor, secondly, is this trait in Shelley the less fundamental, because it does not happen to be the earliest to find words. He was an apostle long before he was a sad solitary, and indeed before he was, to any purpose, a poet at all. His faith was formed before he could write real poetry well. While at school, he had made his vow to be 'just and free and mild,' and to serve his fellow-men; and he was also early sworn to the service of intellectual, or ideal, beauty. And his first noticeable verse, from the date of *Queen Mab* onwards, is mainly devoted to these aspirations. But they are not for that more profound than his other and contrasting impulse, which is breathed out in his best lyrics. In the third place, these two master-feelings must not be taken to exhaust, between them, the nature of Shelley. Often he is neither

a visionary and idealist, nor yet an elemental, sorrowing spirit, but in quite a different frame of mind. In *The Witch of Atlas*, as intimate a poem as he ever wrote, he moves in a world of free fantasy and ethereal sportiveness. In *The Cenci* and *Charles the First* there is an unexpected power of dramatic self-suppression. Everything shows that we have to do with a genius that had not yet come to the full and whose future direction cannot be guessed. To the last Shelley was always beginning afresh.

He was a precocious scribbler both of prose and verse, but was not, like Pope or Chatterton, a poet very early. Few will turn to anything that he wrote before *Queen Mab*, except to see what food his mind had already rejected. The lines called *Cwm Elan* honestly echo the spirit of Wordsworth and the ring of Scott. But *Ruth* and *Michael* were no pattern for Shelley, who was never deceived, or attracted, by Wordsworth's theory of diction; his own simplicity of style, which he lays aside at will, is of a different order. Nor did he for a long while care to portray any one but himself, or a bodiless double of himself. 'As to real flesh and blood,' he said at a later date, 'you know I do not deal in those articles'; and the confession, until he created Beatrice Cenci, was not too modest. Shelley afterwards

treated Wordsworth as a political apostate who was punished by his own dulness. But he always honoured the writer of *Tintern Abbey*, as it became him to do. He is not merely in debt to the philosophy of that poem. *Tintern Abbey*, in style, is the ennobled descendant of the abstract, declamatory verse of the eighteenth century, to which the heroic blank line had been appropriated; and it is by that verse, thus ennobled, that the blank verse of Shelley is influenced. But Shelley, while a devotee of nature and Plato, has also a new thing to say, though it is long before he can say it well. The positive and negative dogmas expounded in the discoloured prose of William Godwin's *Political Justice* (1793) are proclaimed in *Queen Mab* in a rude shape with which Shelley soon became impatient, but which only slightly caricatures his lifelong creed. The history, the condition, and the hopes of the human race, and the obstacles to those hopes, are beheld with much the same eyes in *Prometheus Unbound* as in *Queen Mab*. No English poet, except Blake, of whom Shelley seems to have been ignorant, had as yet been inspired by similar conceptions and aspirations, which were to have a long life in our literature. The notes to *Queen Mab*, wholly unoriginal as they are, are of more interest than the text, and are written in prose which comes

of a good stock. They repeat much of the argument of *The Necessity of Atheism*, which cost Oxford Shelley's presence. The opinions of Godwin on war, property, and marriage, of Hume on miracles, of Condorcet on the perfectibility of man, and of Holbach on the crimes of Providence, are faithfully copied down. His materialism, indeed, Shelley soon gave up, but his attachment to theoretical fatalism not so soon. Metaphysical idealism was more native to him, and he read the dialogues of Berkeley with sympathy; but he managed still to pin on to it the ethical and social views of Godwin, which thus survived their original scaffolding. He was afterwards to strike living water from those seemingly arid rocks; but everything in *Queen Mab* shows that his faith had grown quicker than his genius.

'The rhythm of *Queen Mab*,' says Mary Shelley, 'was founded on that of *Thalaba*,' and the blank uneven iambic lines, in which most of the poem is written, have a kind of frustrate music. But, like those of Sayers and Southey, they vainly cry out either for regularity of length, or for rhyme, or for the absence of metre. They fall into exalted over-metrical prose:

Upon the couch the body lay wrapt in the depth of slumber. Its features were fixed and meaningless, yet animal life was there, and every

organ yet performed its natural functions. 'Twas a sight of wonder to behold the body and soul. The self-same lineaments, the same marks of identity were there, yet oh ! how different !

No one, on learning that this is verse, could say where the lines conclude ; and that is fatal to its claim to be printed as metre. The passages of true metre which announce the undoubted style of Shelley therefore strike the ear as deviations. Most of them occur in the setting, which describes the sleeping Ianthe and the magic car, and which has a pale moony beauty of its own. But the Fairy Mab, with her Shakespearean title and fragile texture, is a strange guide over battle-fields and a quaint declaimer against commerce. Shelley, perhaps feeling this incongruity, suppressed her in a recast which he made of portions of the poem (the first two sections, and the eighth and ninth), and put in her place the ' Dæmon of the World ' ; a dreary personage enough, and one fitter for the declamation in hand. There is now a larger allowance of true blank verse. Some of it is fresh and fine, but most of it is still in bondage. The style of Shelley slowly disengages itself from that of his models, of Thomson or Wordsworth, like a child who passes through a fleeting likeness to some ancestor before coming to his proper voice and features. This process

can be seen in *The Dæmon of the World.* In a few lines we see the mixture of *The Seasons*, of *Tintern Abbey*, and of Shelley himself:

Yet, human Spirit, bravely hold thy course,
Let virtue teach thee firmly to pursue
The gradual paths of an aspiring change:
For birth and life and death, and that strange
state
Before the naked powers that thro' the world
Wander like winds have found a human home,
All tend to perfect happiness, and urge
The restless wheels of being on their way,
Whose flashing spokes, instinct with infinite life,
Bicker and burn to gain their destined goal:

—there it is at last! After the abstract jogging old diction, with its tedious final stop—*the gradual paths of an aspiring change*—and its prose book-phrase, *tend to perfect happiness*; and after the Wordsworthian lift into upper air, by the *naked powers that through the world wander like winds*; after this, suddenly comes Shelley's own, inalienable speech, when the words themselves *bicker and burn to gain their destined goal*; as they were to do thenceforth, and as they begin to do in *Alastor, or the Spirit of Solitude*, Shelley's next long, and his first great poem; a poem of the ebb, expressive of disenchantment and not of hope.

II

Alastor; the 'poet,' a projection of Shelley—Early shorter poems: *Mutability*, etc.

Here the model is still the exalted, ruminative verse of Wordsworth; and that of Landor's *Gebir* may be audible too; but the lucid and pure flame proper to Shelley is everywhere underneath. His heroic line, too, is seen taking shape, and he has a noticeable new liking, perhaps derived from Milton, for slow spondaic cadences. There are many lines like

The lone couch of his everlasting sleep

Or

And wasted for fond love of his wild eyes

Or

Hang their mute thoughts on the mute walls around.

There is a new balance, and also a new resonance and emphasis. *Alastor*[n], though digressive, is not shapeless: indeed is better moulded than many of Shelley's maturer pieces. And there are more rapid, dramatic lines, which indicate a different model altogether, like

The eloquent blood told an ineffable tale ;

Or

With fierce gusts and precipitating force.

And in general there is a poise, a leisureliness of rhythm, indeed a prevalent hammer-like emphasis, to which Shelley does not again return. The deft employment of ringing Eastern names, *Oxus*, *Aornos*, *Chorasmian*, was remembered by the poet of *Sohrab and Rustum*, whose ungrateful and incapable judgment upon Shelley, if it must be mentioned at all, shall not be controverted here.

The obscurities of *Alastor* are chiefly due to the intermittence of the allegory, which at times, during the Poet's voyage, vanishes without warning, in a way to which the reader of Spenser is accustomed. But the larger drift is plain. Shelley's hopes for the human race at large are here almost silent. The Poet is one of his many projections of himself—one of the first of the *radiated* Shelleys, half dream and half substance, who keep on appearing till the last. He is at first contented with the solitary enjoyment of nature, and of thought, and of dead history. But the dream of perfect love and beauty intrudes and craves for real embodiment. Other men and women, with their simple human love, are dissatisfying shadows and fall short of the ideal. The poet is pursued by Alastor, the avenging

spirit of solitude. 'He seeks in vain for a prototype of his conception. Blasted by his disappointment he descends to an untimely grave.' Thus *Alastor* is a cry of revolt against the terms of our human life. It utters the passion, at once hopeless, imperative, and fatal, which lures us on to seek in mankind what nature cannot give and yet forces us to ask. This feeling may be transcendentally stated in the poem; but so far being inhuman or remote, it is the ordinary burden of thinking men. That Shelley, in his preface, sees the deadly result of such a 'self-centred seclusion' if carried to its extreme, does not remove the burden. The style of *Alastor* is nobly responsive to the expression of these subtleties, and for the first time Shelley floats, unhindered by his reading, in the dazzling and changing world of his own imagery.

The *Dedication* of *The Revolt of Islam* shows that in the story of *Alastor* Shelley had stopped short of the critical event in his own life, his meeting with Mary Godwin, whose love seemed to him, at least for the time, to offer what the Poet in *Alastor* had missed. The shorter pieces of 1814 and 1815 show this new influence, and the lines *To Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin* breathe of repose. But *Mutability*, once more, is in the spirit of *Alastor*; a spirit coloured, says Mrs.

Shelley, 'by the recent anticipation of death'; and this dalliance with the thought, rather than with the desire, of death became recurrent in Shelley. The lines written at Lechlade are full of it; they are a gentler and softer salutation of the same idea:

Thus solemnized and softened, death is mild
And terrorless as this serenest night:
Here could I hope, like some enquiring child
Sporting on graves, that death did hide from human sight
Sweet secrets, or beside its breathless sleep
That loveliest dreams perpetual watch did keep.

But the wilder, the inveterate Shelley, ever breaking away from his own consolations, is also heard; and the lines 'The cold earth slept below,' prove how far the spirit of Romance, by this time, has travelled, and what, in the kingdom of lyric, it has made of itself:

The moon made thy lips pale, beloved—
The wind made thy bosom chill—
The night did shed on thy dear head
Its frozen dew, and thou didst lie
Where the bitter breath of the naked sky
Might visit thee at will.

Of the other poems of this period, the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* is the most imposing. The record of Shelley's pledge to be the servant of

Beauty is worthy of him, and there is no need to answer his question, 'Have I not kept the vow?' But the form is hardly adequate, and he does not manage the irregular, apostrophic, metaphysical ode so well as Wordsworth or Coleridge. Parts of the poem read like a magnificent exercise. In *Mont Blanc*, a fiery and soaring piece in the manner of *Alastor*, the wanderer's spirit is 'driven like a homeless cloud from steep to steep.' The music throughout is great and exalted; but the capricious spacing of the rhymes vexes the ear. The same device as used in *Lycidas* does not. Shelley's longer poems are best studied along with the showers of lyrical star-dust that attended their launch into space. Many songs of the year 1817, when *Laon and Cythna* was written at Marlow, are unfinished; 'many a stray idea and transitory emotion,' says Mrs. Shelley, 'found imperfect and abrupt expression, and then again lost themselves in silence,' and they are often melancholy. *Death* and *Unsatisfied Desires* are among the titles given by the editors, and are expressive enough. But in one, which is happily complete, *To Constantia, Singing*, the lyric genius of Shelley rises splendid and buoyant from the waves. It not only describes but communicates the rapture awakened by a golden voice; and the rhythm

of every stanza, rising in triumph, and slowly, lingeringly, but inevitably falling, conveys that sense of disembodiment for which few other poets have found language.

III

The Revolt of Islam (*Laon and Cythna*): incoherences; riddles; metre—*Prince Athanase*—Shelley's character, its bearing on his art.

Laon and Cythna, which Shelley unwillingly altered, was published in 1818 in its new form as *The Revolt of Islam*. In the revised version the lovers are no longer brother and sister, and the changes involved are all for the better. 'Incest,' says Shelley elsewhere, in a comment on Calderon, 'is, like many other incorrect things, a very poetical circumstance.' That depends on the treatment; in *Laon and Cythna* it is a circumstance of no poetical interest. The real subject is the liberation of mankind from bondage by the power of thought, love, and beauty; and this event is symbolized by Laon and Cythna's 'liberation of the Golden City.' But Shelley's purpose in his first draft, 'to startle the reader from the trance of ordinary life,' is only fulfilled in either version by lulling him into another trance, in which things happen with less than the logic of dreams. *The Revolt of Islam* does

indeed relate, like *Alastor*, the mental travels of the poet, as well as the holy war to which he is dedicated. Othman is a type of the oppressors of the earth, and his outrage upon Cythna, the embodied principle of love and devotion, explains itself. The final sacrifice of the lovers, and their translation to the 'Temple of the Mind' and the 'Senate of the Dead,' signify the martyrdom of the freethinker, whose one reward is in the tardy memory of men. But what is meant by the child of Cythna? Why are the incarnations of free thought assailed by that strange regiment of founders, 'Joshua and Mahomet, Moses and Buddh'? The incoherence at times recalls Blake's miscreate epics; and there is much in *The Revolt of Islam* to repel the artistic reason. But if we let the reason sleep and are content to watch a succession of dissolving views, the poem is seen to overflow with beauty, from the faultless dedication to the last voyage of the reunited spirits whose bodies have perished on the pyre. The measure is Spenser's, but Shelley has made it anew. The Elizabethan cadence he seldom reproduces; and there are some traces of the clanging oratory of *Childe Harold*; but the stream of the narrative, equable yet varied, lovely but not languid, with its reflections of starry imagery and

rainbow colour, is utterly unlike Byron's boisterous torrent.

At this stage of his art Shelley can well be charged, like Byron, with representing only one character, himself. In *Prince Athanase* the Shelleyan hero, as he may be called, reappears with a difference. Athanase has been brought up, in painful remoteness from his fellows, upon Greek philosophy and poetry, and is for long disappointed both of earthly love and of its ideal counterpart. We learn from Mrs. Shelley's note that the fourth portion of this fragmentary work was to have ended with a consoling visit paid to Athanase, just before his death, by the spirit of intellectual love. This, then, is a variation of the theme of *Alastor* and *The Revolt of Islam*, where there are similar 'impersonations of the beautiful and the just.' One trait in all these figures must be mentioned. They suffer pain, solitude, and disappointment, but never self-reproach. Byron is always called an egotist, and so he is; but he seems to have been sorry for something. Shelley is often called a saint, and he had, or came to have, some of the qualities of the saint. But he also shows an astonishing kind of egotism like that of a child, who only knows that it is hurt, and cannot see when it has hurt its playmate. The evidence has never

clearly shown just how far Shelley's action was responsible for the fate of Harriet. It made him wretched; but hardly remorseful, except for having married her. He seems a simple link—almost an irresponsible link—in that fatal chain of occurrences. This characteristic limits Shelley's art, whether we excuse or condemn him as a man. Perhaps he had no occasion to imagine a will or conscience at odds with itself; it is certain that he cannot do so. His dramas, no doubt, give him little opening for such a portrayal.

It should be added that Shelley's heroes, like Byron's, only express one half of himself. The letters and the poem *To Maria Gisborne* complete the picture in the happiest way, and correct our sense of the strain and fever in which he might seem to have lived. The life at Rydal is hardly simpler, or more natural, or even blither, than much of the life at Pisa. Shelley's frank friendliness and comradeship; his clear-witted tact and good feeling in his intercourse with persons as difficult as Claire, Byron, Godwin, and Leigh Hunt; his odd and fitful but genuine gaiety; his eager simplicity and naturalness: we must get all this into our minds if we are to see him aright. He had a *prose* existence, of which his letters are the most alluring record. He was not always in pain, or in some lonely paradise of

dreams, or militant. The evidence of Trelawny[n] confirms this impression, and remains the most distinct record of Shelley alike on his angelic and his human side. His correspondence becomes much more attractive, and wins the natural sweet ease for which it is famous, as well as becoming far saner and more controlled in language, after the year 1817. Before then it is often tiresome and turgid, and its faults have been imputed wrongly to the adult Shelley. We have also, of course, to reckon with his unearthly, or childish, or even inhuman traits, the cause of misery or perplexity to others ; with his vein of hysteria and delusion, and his power of frightening himself with morbid images ; and with his dangerous capacity for falling in love mystically. These are serious matters for the biographer ; but I am only here concerned with his art, with his bequest, and only touch on them now and then when they affect his art.

IV

Rosalind and Helen ; Julian and Maddalo ; Lines Written among the Euganean Hills—Prometheus Unbound : ruling ideas ; character of Prometheus ; lyrics.

Rosalind and Helen was also begun at Marlow, but was finished at Lucca, after Shelley had left England for good. It is meant for an idyll of real life ; but he laid no stress on it, and the texture is that of a weak romantic novel. It is the expression of Shelley's Godwinian revolt against loveless marriage custom. The ' incurable want of subject ' is not to be denied. The two women exchange their piteous stories ; the widowed Rosalind telling of a tyrannical husband, and Helen of an unwedded union with a lover, Lionel, who is dead. Rosalind's child was taken from her by wicked men, but is at last mysteriously restored, and she lives in peace with it and with her friend Helen ; in a melancholy peace, with a sort of hope. Lionel is a creature of the Laon or Athanase type, described from the point of view of his beloved. He is a kind of trans-

figured Shelley; what Shelley would fain have made himself, or seemed to himself to be. The measure is that of Byron's or Scott's lays, the freer octosyllabic with longer or shorter lines interspersed, and is rapidly written, as if extempore, with occasional strokes of phrase that go home. The rites paid to the faithful dog in the Temple of Fidelity by the lady whom he had saved close with a Coleridgian touch of romance:

> And the lady's harp would kindle there
> The melody of an old air,
> Softer than sleep; the villagers
> Mixt their religion up with hers,
> And as they listened round, shed tears.

In *Julian and Maddalo* there is the accent of Shelley's real and remembered talk with Byron, or Count Maddalo, at Venice. The overture and close and the picture of Byron's daughter Allegra are of this kind; and Shelley uses his supple and beautiful adaptation of the heroic couplet for the mingling of things serious and familiar. But these keen memories melt into excited fantasy and rhetoric when the two friends visit and overhear the mysterious 'maniac,' who seems to be the wreck of a man distraught by domestic misery and the evils of society. Shelley's weakest style of high-pitched wailing and railing has only too much opportunity here, and his own calami-

ties and aspirations are shadowed forth in riddles that disturb our sympathy; for the story has neither the weight of truth nor the charm of free imagination working upon truth.

But in the lyric lay or monologue, the *Lines Written among the Euganean Hills*, there are both these things; here is 'truth in beauty dyed.' Nothing that Shelley wrote in verse or prose, long or short, discloses him so fully as this descant of less than four hundred lines. Not only has each of his habitual moods—that of hope for man and joy in beauty, and that of solitary shivering and sorrow—the fullest play, but they are for once harmonized, and harmonized not by logic, but in a real experience. The mood passes, for everything passes. Its elements break up into discord, and assert themselves separately in other poems, such as the *Stanzas Written in Dejection* of the same date, and *To Misery*. Still, it had found expression. Nowhere else is Shelley so nearly what he is always striving to be—one with the thing he contemplates. He is on one of the rare 'flowering islands,' that 'lie in the waters of wide Agony.' But he is not wholly alone amidst the beauty of the hills. He is also outside himself and his own lot, looking on Venice and Padua, and thinking on Byron and Petrarch and the fate of Italy. Thus fortified, he comes back to

the glory of midday that bathes him; and Shelley, and the sky, and the sun, 'interpenetrated lie' with the living principle of the world:

> Be it love, light, harmony,
> Odour, or the soul of all
> Which from heaven like dew doth fall,
> Or the mind which feeds this verse
> Peopling the lone universe.

This poem is perfectly put together, and it is an intellectual pleasure to see its firm development, even apart from the rapid, impassioned, shimmering brilliancy of the imagery. In form the piece is like a prolonged simile which becomes a metaphor, or a metaphor which becomes a reality. But the things seen are not the reality, they are the metaphor: the reality is Shelley's own soul, with its deadly ebb of dejection, and its strong resurgence of a hope which at first can scarcely believe in itself.

In *Prometheus Unbound* nature is thought of in a larger way, as filled with joy and gaiety at the freeing of mankind. The whole life of the earth is unbound with the unbinding of Prometheus. Nature, figured as Asia, the long-severed bride of Prometheus, is reunited with man in their common freedom; and Shelley has no greater poetic invention than that of the second act,

when in dreams and flushings of the blood the earth and nature presage the general liberation ; afterwards to join, throughout the fourth act, in a *Benedicite* over the event. *Prometheus Unbound* is the greatest of our symbolic dramas. A play it is not ; for none of Shelley's creatures, not even Prometheus himself, can ever reach the general mind, nor could they be staged except for the curious. The tale of Æschylus was as familiar to Greeks as the Hebrew tales are to us ; while Shelley, so far as he did not adapt Æschylus, had to create his own associations. More happens in his play than in *Prometheus Vinctus*. The Greek sufferer merely defies, listens, and is stricken down, the true action being kept for the sequel which is lost to us. But Shelley's Titan unseats Jupiter ; by a machinery, it is true, of which the high style cannot hide the poverty and weakness. Demogorgon, who is somehow the son of Jupiter, and yet is also the eternal principle of things, spurns him into the void. The whole connection of Prometheus and Jupiter before the play begins is obscure. It is not simply that represented by Æschylus ; for Prometheus is now both the installer of Jupiter and his victim. This is very well in the interpretation, which is that man has invented the gods of false theology, who become his tyrants ; but in the myth it is con-

fusing. So, too, is the sense of the various dreams and temples ; but Shelley may have neglected to revise these descriptive passages. The meaning of the drama is thus clearer than its myth—a contrary effect to that which is produced by the *Faerie Queene*. It is this meaning that ranges Shelley, once more, amongst the great spirits of England ; and it shines in clear outline through the inadequate symbolism.

There seem to be two types of those minds that arise from time to time to prove that in man, who can form the conception of eternal goodness, there is some portion of it still resident. One type is steeped in the knowledge of life ; has watched the world, and has felt the inner discord from which man seeks to be freed. A reforming sinner and saint like Augustine, a religious statesman like Alfred, and a practical mystic like St. Teresa, are all, in the high sense of the term, *realists*, with their roots laid in experience. Of the other type is Plato, who watches life with profound intelligence from afar, but who rejects it. Such minds quarrel with reality because it is there and in the way ; they mould their hopes on the negation of it ; they foreshorten the distance of their ideal ; they fling themselves on that ideal, and try to give it transcendental and universal form. They preach absolute love, un-

limited sacrifice, the impossible because it is impossible; and hence their power. We call such minds idealistic, and amongst English writers it is natural to think of Shelley and of Ruskin. The total absence of men and women in Shelley's picture of a redeemed mankind is characteristic. Ione, and Panthea, and Asia, and the Earth, and the Spirit of the Earth, and voices of the air innumerable, are his personages. Only the figures borrowed from the Greek, Prometheus and Mercury, have outline and are themselves; yet they, again, are barely persons. But even if the story of *Prometheus Unbound* be broken-backed, the meaning and the expression are still sublime. Those who cannot away with Shelley's disbeliefs must acknowledge the energy of his ideal. The release of Prometheus is the dethronement of Christianity, but its dethronement by the spirit of Christ; and Jupiter himself is the whole body of insolent, traditional belief and institution which seeks covert under the falsely-claimed authority of the founder. On this destructive side, Shelley's creed, an inheritance from the sceptics of the preceding century, is remarkably like that of Tolstoy. But his picture of the perfect man and the new earth is far more generous and sound than Tolstoy's:

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;
To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;
To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
Neither to change, to falter, nor repent;
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free:
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.

Nothing less than the semi-divine figure of Prometheus, as adapted by Shelley, could embody these ideas. The reconciliation of Prometheus with Zeus, as effected by Æschylus, could only seem to him a 'feeble catastrophe.' The traditional service of Prometheus to mankind, as the giver of culture, he repeats, or rather re-creates, and adds to it the notion that is the mainspring of the drama. Prometheus is man considered as a loving and thinking being, who aspires to liberate himself. It is his fate that he shall earn his release by suffering and defiance, and by forgiving, whilst he overthrows, his tyrant. The notion of Condorcet and the other *philosophes* is here in its quintessence; but it is transformed by the addition of the Christian ideal which they discarded. Mrs. Shelley well explains the conception of her husband:

That man could be so perfectionised as to be able to expel evil from his own nature and

from the greater part of the creation, was the cardinal point of his system.

So huge and typical a figure must needs lose in sharpness of outline something of what it gains in symbolism. He is less real than the hero of Æschylus, who is again less real than the hero of *Paradise Lost*, from whom Shelley borrows obvious traits. The other *dramatis personæ* are 'begotten upon the embrace of a cloud.' They are voices; and yet they are voices carefully distinguished and concerted. With easy skill Shelley interweaves heroic monologue, lyrical recitative, and choric song. The story comes to an end with the third act; but the fourth, though an afterthought, is not a superfluity. It is not only beautiful in itself, but completes the design, as a 'hymn of rejoicing in the fulfilment of the prophecies in regard to Prometheus.' The third act is in blank verse, and there is a limit to the rush and rapture which blank verse can express continuously. Shakespeare may have felt this when he made Romeo and Juliet fall into rhyme. Here a ritual of song is needed to celebrate the release of the world. The admixture of descriptive blank verse in this fourth act prevents monotony; and the speech of the Earth, 'It interpenetrates my granite mass,' is Shelley's masterpiece in that difficult kind of poetry which

is half-way between the pictorial and the lyrical.

If we are to choose between the varieties of perfect song in this drama, perhaps the passages which are most thoroughly stripped of doctrine, of definite ideas, and even of humanity, are the most perfect of all, and Shelley is there most himself. With all the beauty of the more ode-like measures, their residuum of opinion or definable aspiration removes them by so much from the tone of song; those elements being better fitted for recitative or for dramatic speech. The intrusion of social or anti-clerical reflections, in the chorus of the Furies in the first act, can doubtless be objected to; but the same element in the address of Prometheus to the vision, or wraith, of Christ is supremely well managed. And the chorus of the sixfold band of spirits, the 'gentle guides and guardians' of mankind, with its measures gradually prolonged and solemnized, shows a command of lyrical orchestration that makes us think of the second part of *Faust*. Indeed, the transporting power of *Prometheus Unbound* as a whole is hard to parallel, and Shelley himself tells us how he came by it:

> The bright blue sky of Rome, and the effect of the vigorous awakening spring in that divinest climate, and the new life with which it drenches the spirits even to intoxication, were the inspiration of this drama.

V

The Cenci; absence of 'mere poetry'; literary models; form.

In *The Cenci* he tries to portray absolute evil, as in *Prometheus* perfect goodness; and our belief is repelled, not so much because the character of Count Cenci is out of humanity, as because it is undramatic. It is a compound of envy and revenge, with portentous unnatural cruelty thrown in:

> Add thereto a tiger's chaudron
> For the ingredients of our cauldron.

Still, Beatrice and not her father is the protagonist; and in Beatrice Shelley drew what Shakespeare never tried to draw—a woman pure, tender, strong, and profoundly real, who is the chief actor and sufferer in a tragedy. He had a true story to work upon, or a story taken as true—'not to be mentioned in Italian society without awakening a deep and breathless interest,' as well as the portrait of Beatrice, which he so well describes in his preface; and he explains his reading of her character:

Beatrice Cenci appears to have been one of those rare persons in whom energy and gentleness dwell together without destroying one another; her nature was simple and profound. The crimes and miseries in which she was an actor and a sufferer are as the mask and the mantle in which circumstances clothed her for her impersonation on the scene of the world.

Neither Webster nor Tourneur, whose school of poetry Shelley had clearly been studying, would have treated the outrage with the 'delicacy' which he truly claims to have observed. But he has attained it, not by shirking the fact, but by making us see the fact from the point of view of Beatrice herself, who holds it at arm's length, veils it in the mist of the horror that enwraps her, and yet does not allow it for a moment to weaken her purpose. Shelley also pleads that Beatrice is a truly dramatic character, because she *ought* not to have avenged herself—a point open to doubt; and also that she would have been 'wiser and better' had she not done so —only then she would have been undramatic; and that the drama consists in the

restless and anatomizing casuistry, with which men seek the justification of Beatrice, yet feel that she has done what needs justification.

The interest, however, may not lie quite where Shelley suggests. Until the last act there is little

drama at all, though there are pity and terror, poetry and tension, in the highest degree. Except for the momentary thought of suicide, there is little conflict or distraction in the mind of Beatrice :

All must be suddenly resolved and done.

We have little hope or fear that she will not resolve and do. But the drama reaches its highest point, not in the play of her scruples, but in the scene where she is at bay before her judges ; when her patience and sorrow turn to warranted cunning and steely defiance ; when she seizes every point in a losing game ; and when, with apparent evasiveness but essential truth, she puts by the direct question :

Judge. Art thou not guilty of thy father's death ?
Beatrice. Or wilt thou rather tax high judging God
That he permitted such an act as that
Which I have suffered, and which he beheld ;
Made it unutterable, and took from it
All refuge, all revenge, all consequence,
But that which thou hast called my father's death ?
Which is or is not what men call a crime,
Which either I have done, or have not done ;
Say what ye will. I shall deny no more.
If ye desire it thus, thus let it be,
And so an end of all. Now do your will.
No other pains shall force another word.

This is drama ; and if Shelley learnt something from the Jacobean master, inverting the arts of the splendid miscreant Vittoria baffling justice, and applying them to the uses of a noble heroine defying law—which oppresses her because *she* has done the justice that the law would never have awarded ; and if he has sharply united the dreadful and heroic with traits of dissolving pathos ; this is only to repeat that he promises to be the one co-equal master in Webster's kind since Webster's day. But he comes nearer to Shakespeare than to Webster in the last impression that he leaves. It is not that of a lowering or stifling fatalism, according to which ' we are merely the stars' tennis-balls ' ; it is the sense that the mind is above the fate which it courts and suffers, and that Beatrice, when she is led off to die, has somehow an advantage over death, revealing as she does new facets of her radiance up to her last word,

> My Lord,
> We are quite ready. Well, 'tis very well.

In this play Shelley has put aside the weaknesses which he felt might have beset him. All ' mere poetry,' he says, is sternly kept out. There is but one song, that of Beatrice, ' False friend, wilt thou smile or weep ? ' and it is in accord with her and the situation. There is not one

lyrical phrase in the whole work which is there for its own sake ; and the diction is noticeably bare of imagery. The style and verse have a controlled force and a transparent purity which Shelley had not yet secured, and which he did not, save in *Charles the First*, again attempt. The blank metre of *The Cenci*, while as clearly coloured by that of the old drama as that of *Prometheus* is by Milton, is original in stamp, or rather is a new variety of the great traditional species. If it lacks the bitterer felicities of Webster's, it is more flowing and lucid ; and yet is free from the dissolute overflow or loose liquidity into which the versification of the silver age declined. Neither has it the free undulation and lapse, so miraculously like the gusts of actual speech, yet never breaking the fundamental scansion, which appear in Shakespeare's greater tragedies ; resembling rather the verse in his best history plays, where the separate harmony of the single lines is clearly felt without any arrest of continuity.

> The deed is done,
> And what may follow now regards not me.
> I am as universal as the light ;
> Free as the earth-surrounding air ; as firm
> As the world's centre. Consequence, to me
> Is as the wind which strikes the solid rock
> But shakes it not.

VI

Lighter poems : *Peter Bell the Third, Mask of Anarchy*—Poems, 1820-1 ; *The Sensitive Plant, Witch of Atlas, Letter to Maria Gisborne*—*Epipsychidion :* conception of love—*Adonais.*

The Cenci swerves as little from its main action, and has as little of what is called relief, as *Phèdre* or *Britannicus* ; it is in this sense, but in this only, a classical play. The writer of such a tragedy needs relief as much as the reader ; and Shelley found it by turning to satire and parody. He lightened the months after he had composed *The Cenci* by also making *Peter Bell the Third*, in seven parts. He had his share of odd gaiety and of the burlesquing instinct ; he was not always too exalted to be playful, or too sad to jeer. *Peter Bell the Third* is aimed at Wordsworth, and is in a simple ballad-like measure. In his demeanour towards Wordsworth and Coleridge, Shelley is on common ground for once with the author of *Don Juan* ; but he is a gentler and better critic, if his satire is not so well kept up. He can be savage : Peter Bell's timorous courtship

of nature, and the 'double damnation' of dulness which comes upon him through his service to the Devil, are in the vein of the *Vision of Judgment*. Shelley, in an austere sonnet, had already deplored Wordsworth's supposed 'desertion' of his service to 'truth and liberty,' and was ever impatient with his theory of poetic diction. The tedium of his later verse Shelley, not wholly in jest, treats as a punishment for his lapse; and Peter Bell, the literal man, is identified with his creator; yet not all ill-naturedly, or in oblivion of Wordsworth's inspired years and of Shelley's own debt to him:

> At night he oft would start and wake
> Like a lover, and began
> In a wild measure songs to make
> On moor, and glen, and rocky lake,
> And on the heart of man—
>
> And on the universal sky—
> And the wide earth's bosom green,—
> And the sweet, strange mystery
> Of what beyond these things may lie,
> And yet remain unseen. . . .
>
> He had also dim recollections
> Of pedlars tramping on their rounds;
> Milk-pans and pails; and odd collections
> Of saws, and proverbs; and reflections
> Old parsons make in burying-grounds.

This is not ferocious; it is a private coterie-poem to which Shelley did not wish to put his name.

His Aristophanic attempt, *Œdipus Tyrannus, or Swellfoot the Tyrant*, to ridicule the king and the affair of Queen Caroline, is dismal and unreadable ; the jokes do not show ability. His principal other work of this sort is *The Mask of Anarchy*, ' written on the occasion of the massacre at Manchester ' in 1819. It reveals a gift, as unexpected as it was unpursued, for the sort of satire which is both popular and high-poetical. There is a likeness in it to Blake which has often been noticed ; the same kind of anvil-stroke, and the same use of an awkward simplicity for the purposes of epigram :

> Next came Fraud, and he had on,
> Like Eldon, an ermined gown ;
> His big tears, for he wept well,
> Turned to millstones as they fell.
>
> And the little children, who
> Round his feet played to and fro,
> Thinking every tear a gem,
> Had their brains knocked out by them.

But this grim and gnomic style is for Shelley only a feat. He breathes more freely when he is rid of it, and his appeal to the English people to rise against the tyranny of the Government permits him to summon those elements which are never sullen to his spell :

Let the horsemen's scymitars
Wheel and flash, like sphereless stars
Thirsting to eclipse their burning
In a sea of death and mourning.

The last years were the richest of Shelley's life, and mark more than one fresh disclosure of his power. For his new moods and thoughts, or the old ones changing and blending, beget new poetic forms; and that is how we know that an artist is not marking time. This expansive power goes on at a startling rate of progression till the end. *The Sensitive Plant* is a re-shaping, though not a reiteration, of familiar images and musings. The poet figures his own lonely spirit as a mimosa in the heart of an earthly paradise, and embodies the ideal, satisfying loveliness, of the kind sought by Alastor and Laon, in the Lady of the garden. She fades, the garden is left bare, the plant withers, and so far the ending is parallel to that of *Alastor*; but by a sudden afterthought, or *revirement*—marked by the slowing and smoothing down of the quick trisyllabic ripple of the lines, which thus lose their plaintive, even slightly infantine and vexing sing-song—the poet questions the reality, not this time of death, but of life; in view of the eternity of beautiful things, of which he thinks for the moment as self-subsistent apart from the enjoying mind. Shelley's

wasteful expense of his powers in describing the horrible gives an immature effect to this otherwise delicate poem.

The Witch of Atlas is, on the contrary, the rarest of all his fantasies. The Witch is a new creature of his dream of beneficent loveliness ; a calm but kind, a passionless but compassionate watcher of human fates ; a gatherer of all the innocent and splendid things that visit man in reality or day-dream, of all sweet odours and visions ; and a president over the gaieties of fire and the sports of the elements. The poem is complex in its inspiration. Shelley starts from that playful, light, mischievous kind of Greek humour, of which he shows so quick a sense in his versions of the *Cyclops* and the *Hymn to Mercury*. The Witch's mythic parentage, part-solar and part-Atlantid, serves for a mock-epical theme, which is wrought out with the warm life and changefulness that belong to such fancies. Beings of the antique brain, they shift under the hand of each new poet who, like Shelley, can make good his right to fashion them. Spenser's *Garden of Adonis* is well matched, and perhaps remembered, in the recital of the Witch's possessions. Next follows a rainbow fabric of purely Shelleyan invention, ending in the creation of the Hermaphrodite, a symbol uniting the qualities of beauty

that transcend sex. All this is far removed from such dexterous and glittering work as *The Rape of the Lock* by its essential gentleness, and also by Shelley's freedom of movement in the world of the pure elements. It is fantasy, not to be discerned from the higher work of imagination except by its streak of ingenuity. In the last section, Shelley's familiar vision of a restored world of love receives a new and lively variation. The voyage of the Witch amidst the sleeping human souls, whose 'naked beauty' is laid open to her; her Mab-like portioning out to them of elfish but medicinal visions; and her preservation of the chosen dead in a happy slumber, 'living in its dreams beyond the rage Of death or life'—all show that Shelley, who had done his utmost in *Prometheus* for the majestic expression of his creed, now felt free to play. The Italian octave in which the poem is written may perhaps be felt, towards the close, to run into a too purely satiric vein; but Shelley masters it in his own way, gives it new powers, and avoids letting it run riot in that traditional anti-climax, which is Byron's favourite and disenchanting trick.

The *Letter to Maria Gisborne*, composed in the same summer mood, also reveals Shelley at his ease, and, as we have said, serves, like his letters in prose, to give the lie to any misconceptions

that may linger concerning his character. The 'shrill,' 'ineffectual,' 'humourless' personage, who is but 'the poet of clouds and sunsets,' is heard speaking, strangely enough, as humanly and familiarly as Charles Lamb:

'No humour':

a china cup that was
What it will never be again, I think,
A thing from which sweet lips were wont to drink
The liquor doctors rail at—and which I
Will quaff in spite of them—and when we die
We'll toss up who died first of drinking tea,
And cry out—heads or tails?—where'er we be.

Shelley may now be shrill:

Memory may clothe in wings my living name
And feed it with the asphodels of fame,
Which in those hearts which must remember me
Grow, making love an immortality.

'Clouds and sunsets':

Custards for supper, and an endless host
Of syllabubs and jellies and mince-pies,
And other such ladylike luxuries,—
Feasting on which we will philosophize!
And we'll have fires out of the Grand Duke's wood,
To thaw the six weeks' winter in our blood.
And then we'll talk; what shall we talk about?

'Ineffectual angel':

And here like some weird Archimage sit I,
Plotting dark spells, and devilish enginery,
The self-impelling steam-wheels of the mind
Which pump up oaths from clergymen, and grind

The gentle spirit of our meek reviews
Into a powdery foam of salt abuse,
Ruffling the ocean of their self-content—

—all this, interrupted by the gusts of Libeccio and the Contadino's song, makes a most harmonious medley ; and the lines slip from Shelley's pen without forethought for the rhyme, which infallibly comes right.

In the unused scraps of *Epipsychidion*[n] there are traces of this conversational, even jesting speech, and allusions to the *Quarterly Review* ; but in the completed poem the lighter tone only survives faintly. The differences of cadence, poetic pitch, and emotional level are nevertheless well marked, and form a clue to the changing moods in which the work should be read. Those enforcing the doctrine that love need not be tied to one object at one time, and that we need not be faithful after the fading of love, which in its essence passes on from each embodiment of its own ideal to a fuller one—to a soul that complements and fulfils the soul of the lover—are mostly written in the epigrammatic, so serenely assertive manner, that Shelley may have learnt from Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* :

True love in this differs from gold and clay,
That to divide is not to take away. . . .
If you divide suffering and dross, you may
Diminish till it is consumed away ;

If you divide pleasure and love and thought,
Each part exceeds the whole ; and we know not
How much, while any yet remains unshared,
Of pleasure may be gained, of sorrow spared.

There are even touches of almost playful artifice perceptible when Shelley is haunted by rhythms of the despised school of Pope. Mary and Emilia, the Moon and the Sun, are in turn to share his devotion ; and who can read these lines in a ponderous and legal spirit ?—

So, ye bright regents, with alternate sway
Govern my sphere of being, night and day !
Thou, not disdaining even a borrowed might ;
Thou, not eclipsing a remoter light ;

In spite of Shelley's remark that 'the poem is not flesh and blood, for you know I do not deal in those articles,' his doctrine of free love is proclaimed in earnest ; but in what kind of earnest, may readily be mistaken. It is certain that one of the dry roots of this strange blossom of poetry is *Political Justice*, the book of Mary's father, where it is argued with solemn but sincere paradox that legal marriage is morally not binding when love has gone, and is indeed an evil in itself, like other institutions. This Shelley believed ; and the doctrine of free love is inwrought by him with the other doctrine, adapted from Platonism, of ideal or intellectual love, which had so often

appeared in his verse already, and on which the best comment is his subtle but fragmentary essay *On Love*. His study of Dante's *Vita Nuova* and *Canzoniere*, with their history of a rarefied and spiritualized love, also counted for much. Apart from the designed but inartistic obscurity of some personal allusions, most of the darkness of *Epipsychidion* vanishes if we suppose that Shelley means in it neither more nor less than just what he says. It is a real, if metaphysical, expression of his absorbing though not lasting passion for Emilia Viviani ; of passion never perhaps meant to be realized in fact, but fully realized in imagination. In verse, they are united. All the while, Shelley is in love not so much with two or more women as with Love, which they successively, and even at the same time, embody. At the end he comes back to Emilia and imagines their life together, not now with any squandering of metaphors, but with a luminous and lovely distinctness of portraiture. Her features, and all human features, at last vanish in the consuming devotion of the poet to beauty for its own sake ; and this devotion is the living principle of his language.

The subtle and fervent writing which Shelley commanded in his psychological verse here reaches its highest power. The swiftly-soaring and never-flagging heroic rhyme is a thing of

pure beauty, and will bear any criticism. The transitions to and from the more familiar style—the dips earthward and then upward—are not jarring or disconcerting, but part of the rhythm of the flight. Shelley's lyrical, like Shakespeare's dramatic, language, often gives the peculiar effect of a train of fire, one metaphor kindling another as it goes ; this is not the case with Keats or in Wordsworth, who economize and give one impression. Shelley, like Shakespeare, is also clear-cut when he chooses, as in the vision of himself and his beloved conversing 'under the roof of blue Ionian weather.' But the other, the allusive manner, is more characteristic of *Epipsychidion*.

We must take what the gods give ; yet it is not the best fortune that the longer and greater English elegies should all have been framed with artifice, and written with a conscious elaborate splendour, as though uttered to a huge audience rather than to the poet himself. Sometimes a song of Webster or of Cowper hits harder than the threnodies of Milton, Shelley, and Tennyson. Each of these poets is not only sincere but deeply impassioned ; yet it seems to be a law that we are moved so much the less sharply by any expression of loss, as it fails to keep to the object and eddies out into larger contemplations. Goethe's dirge on Byron, as Euphorion, is free from this

drawback, though he did not know Byron in person and does not affect the tone of bereavement; for it keeps to the object. Both Shelley and Tennyson, of course, are also masters of the brief lyric dirge. A prolonged elegy—unless, indeed, like *In Memoriam*, it consists of a series of separate poems sewn together—almost demands some sort of machinery. In *Lycidas* and *Adonais* there is the classical machinery. Invocation, the sympathy of nature, the procession of mourners, personal digression, lament, climax, change of mood, and final consolation:—each poet adapts the scheme to his own genius. And the likeness to the type is increased by the note of invective which dignifies *Lycidas*; but it spoils *Adonais*; for even had Keats been killed 'by an article,' which was not the case, what have Quarterly Reviewers to do with that which is written and conceived *sub specie æternitatis*?

For thus *Adonais* is really written and conceived; such is its peculiar glory amongst elegies. The framework, with its recollections of Bion and Milton, is from the outset lightened, and soon disappears. The style, at first marked by a certain note of oratory, perhaps suggested by the blunt style of *Childe Harold*, becomes rarer and clearer; the 'many-coloured glass' gives way to the 'white radiance.' If not higher in conception than

Epipsychidion, this poem is more firmly based in thought and humanity. And it is richer in substance ; for Shelley, except in the famed lines where he describes what he dreamed himself to be, and in the sudden prophetic close, escapes from himself ; and he speaks here not of love, but of glory and death and his fellow-poets and of the plastic spirit of the world. These themes are wrought into a long symphony. The first thirty-eight verses which form the lament, are in a different tone from the last seventeen which form the consolation. They are in a style (except for the mistaken attack on the reviewer) of singular magnificence. Shelley endows as with the life of faint separate souls the Dreams and Desires and Adorations of the dead poet, which hover round the bier ; they speak in sweet wailing voices like his own. The subsequent procession of the poets, however loftily managed, is purely an ideal one, for Byron was not intimate with Keats, and Leigh Hunt was not present at his death ; so we can but wish with Shelley that he had known in time of the devotion of Severn, and had paid him honour in such verse. We are not indistinctly told in what sense Adonais ' wakes or sleeps with the enduring dead ' ; or rather, we can clearly see Shelley's fluctuation of thought on the matter. Adonais has won glory,

and his spirit, through his poetry, works among men. He also is 'made one with Nature,' and lives because she is alive. He shares, in some sense, in the eternal labours of that Spirit which shapes all forms of beauty; and he is absorbed in

> that sustaining Love
> Which through the web of being blindly wove
> By man and beast and earth and air and sea,
> Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
> The fire for which all thirst.

The poet has, at any rate, to work in figures that imply some kind of personal life, though it is not the kind we know. The last lines refer, not to the station of Keats among the poets, nor to his intensified individual existence after death, but to his pre-eminence among great souls—'the Eternal'—who, because they are eternal, share all the more fully in the universal and immanent principle of life. The form of *Adonais* is nobly adequate to these themes. Shelley, since *The Revolt of Islam*, has made a new thing of Spenser's stanza. It is now a heroic metre applied to a metaphysical purpose, full of sound and weight, nobly fitted for the argument, and also lending itself to unusual concentration. No poem of Shelley's contains more single lines and phrases that cling to the memory; and he was surely right in thinking it one of his best achievements.

VII

Hellas, Charles the First—The Triumph of Life: its theme and workmanship.

Hellas, which he accurately calls a 'series of lyric pictures,' is not much like the *Persae*, 'the first model of my conception,' except that it celebrates the delivery of Greece. It was inspired by the news of the insurrection of 1821, and was perforce a prophetic rather than a justified thanksgiving. The ending, therefore, is not that of a drama; and in the greatest of his impersonal lyrics, 'The world's great age begins anew,' Shelley sees an earnest of the hopes of mankind in the future destiny of Greece. The whole work is thus a visionary forecast. There is much soaring blank verse, but the special grace of the poem is in its clustered songs. The lyrics of *Prometheus Unbound* are more ethereal, and suggest showers of light raining from some magic urn. But those of *Hellas* are nearer to humanity. They are hymns of political faith and hope, 'songs before sunrise.' The faith may be vain and the hope deferred, but both are definite; they concern

actual countries and historic struggles. There is more for the brain to take hold of than is usual in Shelley's songs. 'Worlds on worlds are rolling ever,' and 'Darkness has dawned in the East,' testify anew to his unspent lyrical invention, and forbid us to fear that his powers were past the full when he sailed on the fatal day. The first of these pieces is from the hand that translated Goethe's *Prologue in Heaven*, and has a similar music.

In the fragment, *Charles the First*, Shelley is feeling his way to an art that is still unfamiliar; but there is not only enough poetry, but also enough promise of dramatic power, to make us wonder once more what we may have lost in him. Shelley has constrained himself to feel a true dramatic sympathy with Charles and Henrietta; but his Puritans are commonplace, and his Hampden talks pure Shelley. The piece was dropped, the poet's strongest bent being still for the disembodied and the abstract, not for reality and drama; and he turned to his other and final fragment, which as he left it is the hardest of his poems, *The Triumph of Life*.

The 'triumph' is a pageant, in the Petrarchian sense of the term; whether it is also a victory is uncertain, for Shelley does not try to answer his lifelong question,

Then what is Life ? I cried.

For life, in the poem as it stands, is a mere rout, a scene of bewilderment, a blind dance towards a goal of darkness, leading from distracted youth to powerless age ; unredeemed by any Prometheus, though lightened by the presence of some rare spirits who ' could not tame Their spirits to the conquerors.' The ' conquerors ' are the leaders of men, the royal ' anarchs,' such as Napoleon and the popes. Such a view of history shows the weak digestion that was Shelley's chief intellectual disability. But it was a condition of the advance of the human spirit, that for a time it should make short work of the past ; the contempt for the historical spirit had been a well-known symptom of the ' enlightenment ' ; and for a prophet like Shelley some such weakness was almost necessary, if his mind was to be light and free and to fix itself on the new heaven and new earth of which he dreamed. In this unfinished poem there is no new earth in sight. But the prelude suggests that, as in *The Euganean Hills*, some Paradiso might have succeeded that Inferno which our present life is represented as being. And the words of salutation to Dante accord with this probability :

Behold a wonder worthy of the rhyme

Of him who from the lowest depths of hell,
Through every paradise and through all glory,
Love led serene, and who returned to tell

The words of hate and awe ; the wondrous story
How all things are transfigured except Love.

This and other passages make us say to ourselves that Shelley might have been an ideal translator of the *Paradiso*, supposing him to have mastered the *terza rima* as Dante understood it ; that is, as a chain of grammatically independent, or at least cleanly sundered tercets, with the single lines firmly marked and weighty, yet with a continuous linkage of sense as well as of rhymes. Shelley regards the pause at the end of the tercet, not as a rule that admits of relaxation, but as an obstacle to evade ; and this evasion is also seen in *Prince Athanase*, in the beautiful *Woodman and the Nightingale*, and in his translation of a passage in the *Purgatorio*. In all these cases the stanzas constantly run over. The habit has a beauty of its own, but does not make for restraint of style. Yet the strong hand of Dante is again and again perceptible, combating Shelley's natural expansiveness, and helping him, as Keats advised him, to ' curb his magnanimity, and be more of an artist.'

And ere she ceased

To move, as one between desire and shame

Suspended, I said—If, as it doth seem,
Thou comest from the realm without a name,

Into this valley of perpetual dream,
Show whence I came, and where I am, and why—
Pass not away upon the passing stream.

This is more like Dante's usual arrangement, but Shelley's own laxer lyric manner is always breaking through, and pervades most of the poem. And the vision itself has by no means the clear march or proportioning of its Italian models; either of the cold *Trionfi* of Petrarch, or of Dante's pictures. Not only is it unfinished, with rhymes sometimes unsupplied, personal riddles unexplained, and 'shapes' and 'spirits' uninterpreted. But the whole tale is put out of joint by the intrusion of Rousseau, who suddenly appears to explain the pageant, but who only succeeds in relating, also in symbolic form, his own life's pilgrimage, which soon melts into Shelley's own. Greatness no one can fail to see in *The Triumph of Life*; but that it could have been a good poem, unless it had been put back into the crucible, is difficult to suppose.

VIII

Lyric: varieties of ode; *Ode to Naples;* the briefer ode: *To the West Wind, To a Skylark; The Cloud,* and *Arethusa*—Briefer lyrics; their varieties; fragility and intellectual substance—Translated verse, from Greek, German, and Spanish.

Shelley's supremacy amongst our lyrical poets hardly needs asserting, but its nature and title are not so easy to define. For one thing, his lyrical impulse penetrates into his unlyrical verse, be it pictorial, epical, or dramatic; as it also does with Swinburne, and as it does much less with Wordsworth, or Byron, or Keats. *The Witch of Atlas* and *Epipsychidion* are often only kept by the metre from being actual lyrics. This tendency is least of all felt in regular drama; as in *The Cenci*, where Shelley was on his guard against 'mere poetry.' But it is felt almost everywhere else, and is in general a quickening and propelling influence, though it also (as in *The Revolt of Islam*) makes for diffusion and weakness.

In most kinds of true lyric, from the prolonged chant down to the smallest shining fragment of

short-lined verse, Shelley is a master who owned few models. He did not, like Blake, apprentice himself to the Elizabethans. His boyish essays tell us little ; but, once he had begun to sing, it cannot be said that his sheer instinct for lyric language was greater at the end of his days than it is in the volume containing *Alastor*. He found more and more things to say in song, he invented more and more tunes. But his work of 1822 is not perceptibly more perfect than his work of 1815. He did not, like his own skylark, chant without labour. He rewrought and rejected incessantly, and left much unfinished. But his writing hides what it may have cost him ; it seems as effortless as breathing. The art of narrative or meditative verse we can to the last see him learning ; but his lyric art we seem to see him merely exercising.

If there be one exception to his mastery of lyric, and one kind of structure less congenial to him than others, it is the lengthy ode, strophic or irregular. The *Ode to Naples* is an example of the first kind, and the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* of the second. The strophic poem, with its corresponsive members and prolonged development, was proclaimed by the heir to Shelley's singing robes as inherently the loftiest sort of lyric verse ; and Swinburne went far to prove his case,

in his *Erechtheus*. Shelley's own work of this sort is not his best. Noble, in his hands, it could not fail to be ; but it hardly shows his full spontaneity or ease of flight. He is more at home in stanza than in strophe. The *Ode to the West Wind* falls into five equal verses of chain-rhyme, or *terza rima*, with an overture, a refrain, and a climax : a scheme of his own making, which answers to the divisions of the thought, and is carried through without break or blemish. Shelley thus seems to steer the element which he invokes, and with which his own soul sweeps along in wild but not lawless union. The first three verses follow the west wind on its course ; the fourth calls upon it to bear the poet away from ' the heavy weight of hours ' ; the last prays for absorption in the west wind (' be thou me, impetuous one '), so that he may rekindle his dead song and scatter it among the hearts of men. This is the greatest of Shelley's more complex lyrics.

To a Skylark he does not call an ode, and it is rather one protracted jet of song, or, as Bagehot says, ' a clear ring of penetrating melody.' There is not the same cunning orchestration of sound as in the *Ode to the West Wind* ; the tone is more piercing. It is not, as absurd reciters make it, an expression of delight, but of a pain too keen for men's ordinary senses to apprehend.

The contrast between the frustration of the poet and the triumphant happiness of the bird is never surmounted, and the conclusion is a cry for the impossible. The alexandrine at the end of each verse gives the fulness and weight which the breathless shorter lines leave us desiring and expecting; but the charm of the piece lies in its crystalline diction. There is, indeed, an excess of grammatical inversions, due to the claim of the soon-recurring rhymes. Yet the diction is of the kind *où la passion parle toute pure*; of that most human of all passions, which would fain be rid of the burden of humanity. In this cry, Shelley comes home to all. He is not a remote or unreal writer, as he is sometimes made out to be; but universal feelings come to him in rare and subtle forms. His pain, which in its essence is common to all men, is so sharp that the faith and solace which he finds in the future of mankind have to be strong indeed to ease it; nothing less than such a faith will serve, and it does not always serve. In this poem the faith is absent.

In *The Cloud* and *Arethusa*, both of them pure pictures, or rather embodiments of elemental speed and movement, in which the poet and his emotions do not appear at all, it may be impious to see anything amiss. Still, there is often some-

thing singsong, even infantine, about Shelley's anapæstic poems, which makes one think that they have gone on long enough. But again and again the craft is consummate. *The Cloud* is of the same structure as the Old English or Latin 'Riddles,' in which the swan, or the storm, or the Rood, speak of, but forget to name, themselves. The essence of this kind of writing is an intense identification with the subject: Henry Vaughan's *Tree* is another instance; but Shelley's way of brilliantly reiterating and turning over his imagery is curiously like that of Anglo-Saxon verse. *Arethusa*, on the other hand, is a verbal and rhythmical utterance of the joy of galloping waters. Arethusa and Alpheus, are they rivers or river-deities? We never ask; the two things are one; and so Shelley recovers that primitive confusion which begets a myth. The musical tact with which the lovely Greek names —*Dorian, Ortygian, Erymanthus*—are spaced among the verses, is not inferior to that shown by Milton in his *Nativity Ode*. Shelley seldom keeps himself, or human feeling, so triumphantly out of the life of these bright and soulless elements, which here seem to speak only for themselves.

But when he chose he could make quite another thing of his four-foot anapæstic rhymes. In the seldom-quoted fragment, *A Vision of the Sea*,

they labour, like Browning's, in the expression of struggle and heaviness ; of the plunging ocean, and the writhing serpent, and the toiling ship. The piece is a conscious exhibition of power, as *The Cloud* is of ease, in language and versification. And the power has a fierce concentrated quality which Shelley, in his lyric, hardly ever displays, and which he attains partly by the deliberate crash of consonants and a daring use of discords, and partly by arresting and overloading his trisyllabic feet with fully-vowelled, or 'long' syllables, in places where light ones are expected :

The fóam | and the smóke | of the báttle
Stàin the cléar | aìr with sún | bòws ; the jár, |
and the ráttle
Of sól | id bònes crúshed | by the ín | finite stréss
Of the snáke's | adamán | tìne volúm | inousness.

Amid such images of violence and terror beauty resides, on a frail ark of safety. The picture of the mother and child floating upon the wreck reminds us of De Quincey's *Dream Fugue*, where the endangered figure of the young girl he had seen from the mail-coach visits him in all manner of ominous conjunctures ; and there, too, as in *A Vision of the Sea*,

Death, Fear,
Love, Beauty, are mixed in the atmosphere.

Shelley's briefer songs and lyrics will not bear separate description, or the touch of prose. No one can come nearer the limits of the wordable ; the substance is of the frailest. In such a piece as 'Life of Life!' the screen of language is thin indeed ; the idea has no existence save in the words that are used. Yet he does not make words do the work of pure tune ; he has always something, however intangible, to say, and his brain keeps pace with the music. The lyric just named occurs in *Prometheus Unbound*, and gives the essence—almost volatilized—of the poem. Many of Shelley's songs which are in all the anthologies approach this character, and express those fleeting but recurrent emotions which are his real self. His love-lyrics are often of this elusive kind, and are generally sad. 'Rarely, rarely comest thou,' and 'Swifter far than summer's flight,' and 'O World! O Life! O Time!' are perhaps the extreme expression of his temper. The *Bridal Song* ('The golden gates of sleep unbar') stands midway, from this point of view, between Shelley's more personal and his more objective lyrics. In one sense it has an universal application ; yet we need only set it beside the old Elizabethan hymeneal odes to see how winnowed and rarefied its sentiment is. The poems in *Prometheus Unbound* and *Hellas*, so rich in

apostolic hope and fervour, have been mentioned already. They show no lapse, but a different and splendid order, of power. Amid their ringing call to arms and rounded melodies, they discover Shelley's peculiar fineness and aristocratical quality of mind. Commonness, of one sort or another, in execution if not in spirit, we could, if we stooped to take the trouble, easily pick out in Byron and Keats, in Coleridge or Wordsworth ; but in Shelley, except sometimes when he is satirizing, never ; nor yet (with the same reserve) in Landor. And in his friendly, sportive, and colloquial lyrics or monologues, the same security of taste is evident. These pieces, along with the *Letter to Maria Gisborne*, bring us back to Shelley's daily life and talk, with its gentle play and soft sparkle.

He translated much, and for amusement, and rapidly ; but his craft does not desert him in such labours. More of a reader than most poets, he is not weighed down by study. He reads like a poet, preferring works of high imagination, classic grace, or philosophic charm. Most of his versions are from the Greek. He gives us the *Banquet* of Plato, and parts of the *Republic* and *Ion*. Here, too, his high breeding in language served him well, and also his love of beauty and relish for subtle argument. The scholarship is

by no means exact, but the translations read like originals, and it is obvious how such tasks and studies affected his own writing. Plato's view of love and beauty is always reappearing in Shelley, not as a fixed doctrine, but as a living and varying inspiration. In the same way *Adonais* is full of the tradition of Sicilian elegy, and the *Witch of Atlas* of the gaieties of old mythology. In verse, Shelley translated the *Cyclops* of Euripides,—the comic songs with particular success ; also the *Hymn to Mercury*, and some of Moschus, and several pieces from the Anthology. Of the ancient authors whom he did not translate, he was most influenced by Æschylus, as the *Prometheus* and *Hellas* show. Spanish and German were in his day still uncommon acquisitions amongst Englishmen. The scenes from Calderon's *Mágico Prodigioso* and from the First Part of *Faust* are freely and dashingly rendered ; and the music of Shelley's lines from the *Prologue in Heaven* is not only near, but like, that of the original.

IX

Prose : Progress of style from a barer to a richer kind—Course of Shelley's opinions sketched—Argumentative prose.

Shelley's letters cover his whole life from 1810 onwards ; but most of his formal prose, except the *Defence of Poetry* and his fragmentary romance *The Coliseum*, seems to have been written before he finally left England. And apart from some youthful magniloquence, such as appears in the Preface to *Alastor*, his prose, in general, advances from a barer to a richer manner. Godwin at first affected his form as well as his ideas, though he always wrote more warmly and less sententiously than Godwin. The frog-like temperature of *The Enquirer* is not reproduced in Shelley. Still, in his notes to *Queen Mab* and in his Irish manifestoes, he starts with an eighteenth-century manner, with a rather ample and flowing sentence, and with a good clear diction. But his prose at this date is not salient and does not arrest the ear. Later—we cannot say when, for some of his best pieces such as *Love* are only to be dated

by guesswork—he gathers colour and intensity, as the influence of Plato and other imaginative writers tells upon him ; and such passages as the descant upon love in *The Coliseum* have the *Symposium* behind them. The same richness, as well as a clear natural flow and ease, is found in his introductions to *Prometheus*, *The Cenci*, and *Hellas* ; these belong, in fact, to Shelley's critical writings, of which the *Defence of Poetry* is the chief.

His metaphysical, moral, social, and religious speculations in prose remain mostly in splinters. Many of them do not so much show his genius as throw light on its development. Some are more or less eloquent decoctions, like *A Refutation of Deism*, which is in fact a plea for atheism. The *Essay on Christianity* is one of the most complete, and can be read as a kind of prose gloss on *Prometheus Unbound*. The *Speculations on Morals* come nearest to a formal and systematic system. Shelley wrote little, in this polemical kind, with a perfectly free play of intelligence, except perhaps the piece *On the Devil and Devils*, which rings with his strange laughter. Often his ideas are borrowed, but receive new life and fire when his imagination works upon them ; and this is especially the case when he writes of love and beauty, or of the poetic imagi-

nation. As his habit of mind, luckily, led him away from a methodical to an artistic treatment of such ideas, it is hardly possible to give a coherent history of his opinions. Yet their general course is clear enough, and they shaped his art and style too powerfully for them to be ignored.

He began with the tenets of Godwin and of Godwin's masters. These he found too stark and uninspiring, and he threw over their materialistic basis, and with it the doctrine of necessity. He became a philosophic idealist in the train of Plato and Berkeley. But he kept some of Godwin's cardinal doctrines all the same, and turned them into poetry. He still thought that persecution was wrong, because all error is involuntary and all vice is ignorance ; and that reasoning, or the mere letting in of light, would cure both vice and error ; that history revealed little but a blind effort on the part of mankind to ruin its own happiness by setting up creeds and governments ; that these must go ; and that Reason impelled by universal Love, and emerging into forms of Beauty, was the Demogorgon who should dethrone Jupiter. But already it is clear how Shelley ennobled the creed of the ' enlightenment,' bringing into it an ideal strain from other sources. Much of his final creed was independent of its first scaffolding. The communion of saints and

sages in the kingdom of earth, ruled by the law of love, is his ultimate dream; and the thistle of dogmatic rationalism has here blossomed indeed. The common objections to Shelley's vision all prove too much; they can be urged against every mind of the eager, prophetic, idealizing type that refuses to see obstacles. He underestimated, of course, the power of the irrational is man, and the stubborn inherited traits of the brute. He did not see that progress is likely to be as slow as ever, and did not allow for relapses or for the need of coercion. All this is too plain for words; and yet he is among the prophets, because of the clearness with which he saw the goal.

Shelley's actual theology varies in its colouring. His revolt from monotheism and historical Christianity led him often into a kind of pantheism which he expresses with great power and beauty, as in *Epipsychidion* and *Adonais*. His rapture of conviction reminds us of Giordano Bruno, but his flame has less of earthly fume and sputter than that of the Italian thinker. But Shelley is usually a dualist, not a pantheist; and much of his poetry depends upon his dualism. The world is a scene of strife between the evil principle, so long in possession, and certain faint but struggling forces for good. In *Alastor* evil is left rampant,

in *Prometheus* good prevails. Shelley does not try to reconcile these contending creeds, the pantheistic and the Manichean, by logic. They are only to be reconciled by his faith and hope that Ahriman, the ill spirit, will one day be vanquished, and the dualism disappear. But this faith and hope, once more, are readily discouraged. And further, as we have said, Shelley often moves in a world of feeling and music in which the struggle in the world, or the struggle between his own opinions, does not appear at all.

X

Conception of art and poetry: *Defence of Poetry*; Platonism—Art and ethics.

His conception of art and poetry, and of their business, is not a simple or consistent one. His *Defence of Poetry* is a series of eloquent sentences and deep intuitions, not a reasoned argument. He holds, with Plato in the *Ion*, that the poet has a share of divine inspiration which is above reason; and by a 'poet' he means, like all the Platonist critics, a creator of anything fair, or great, or virtuous, in words, or tones, or marble, or deeds, or legislation. He tolerates even institutions, when they have been built by the Romans; for then they are full of 'poetry.' But he soon drops this idea, and says that poetry, in the stricter sense, is an art working through language. The language need not be metrical, though metre introduces a beauty of its own. But *what*, then, does poetry convey in language? What has it, what have Homer and Milton, to say? He answers, that poetry proper puts into beautiful

verbal shape some aspect or other of that ideal, which poetry, in its big, comprehensive sense, is an effort to convey. Man is its highest subject; and ideal man is its supreme object of portraiture. It is clear that such a theory makes little provision for much of his own verse; for pure, subjective lyric, or fantasy, or natural description. Nor is his conception of ideal humanity free from ambiguities.

The word 'ideal' is a familiar trap. Sometimes it means spiritually perfect, as Shelley's Prometheus is represented to be. Sometimes it means universally true, or stripped of accident and passing circumstance, like Michael Angelo's great figures, or the Greek gods in sculpture. Or it means something midway, as when we say that the character of Cordelia, or of Antigone, has received 'ideal' treatment from the poet. In such persons the noble element prevails, but it is not carried to the point of unreality. These figures are human enough; they do not intrude into the world of tragedy like abstract patterns or types. Shelley, in his *Defence*, does not work out these differences, and makes unawares some profit out of the confusion. But in his finest passage he rises above them, and states the eternal problem of art, in its bearing upon conduct, with signal insight. Few have so plainly defined the

issue. He repudiates didactic poetry, or the desire to write verses 'for the direct enforcement of reform.' But he would hardly have understood the later notion that art and ethics move in different and never-intersecting planes: a notion, by the way, that leaves *Prometheus Unbound* and the *Paradiso* no reason for existing. He frankly says that his purpose in *Prometheus* is to 'present beautiful idealisms of moral excellence'; the hero is to be

> the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends.

And, in the *Defence*, we see how this type is to be commended:

> The great instrument of moral good is the imagination: and poetry administers to the effect by acting on the cause.

And again, in the Preface to *The Cenci*:

> Imagination is as the immortal God which should assume flesh for the redemption of mortal passion.

It does not matter, after this, that Shelley should commit himself to saying that Prometheus is a better hero than Milton's Satan, because Satan's 'envy, ambition, revenge,' and the like, 'interfere with the interest.' This is merely the voice

of his as yet undeveloped critical sense, and *The Cenci* was to follow to belie it. The virtue of his view of the imagination is that it applies so well to much of the poetry he could *not* write ; to *Macbeth*, and *The House of Life*, and *Modern Love* ; in all of which imagination ' administers to the effect.' As to the further relationship of the beauty to which the imagination gives form, and the good of which it is the ' great instrument,' Shelley does not theorize. Perhaps mankind are divided into the few to whom the good seems a species of the beautiful, and the many who will only accept the beautiful if it is made out to be a species of the good. Shelley seems to identify the two things, without giving priority to either. But the first view, which makes the beautiful the larger term, has the advantage of excluding none of the facts of ethics while it covers most of the facts of art.

XI

Shelley's achievement : structure and composition ; style—Community of style between Shelley and some contemporaries—Varieties of form ; character of Shelley's diction ; some favourite words.

Where, then, is Shelley's own imagination found at work most intensely and efficiently ? His skill in poetic construction is fitful. In *The Revolt of Islam,* his longest piece, it is slight or null. It is at its highest in *The Cenci,* amongst his more elaborate works ; yet the first three acts are not so much drama, as a kind of dramatic narrative. In *Prometheus Unbound* the action is unimpressive ; but there is a perfect mastery and proportioning of the various forms, lyrical, descriptive, and the like, which make up the texture. Shelley's shaping power is at its best in his works of middle length, of between four hundred and a thousand lines. *The Witch of Atlas,* in its lawless law, is the most perfectly built of all. *Adonais* is also nobly arranged. *Epipsychidion,* with all its impetuous flow, has a clear argument, and the balance between metaphysical and concrete poetry

is maintained with a sure instinct. And the briefer poems are not less well made. The *Euganean Hills*, *The West Wind*, and *Arethusa* are examples; and in the short lyrics Shelley's art of overture, development, and close, and his choice of metre in its correspondence with mood and emotion, are safer still.

On his own language he has a note of interest, though he does not often speak of the tools of his art or muse upon the power of words. In the Preface to *Prometheus* he says that he may unwittingly have modified his diction owing to his study of other poets; there is 'a peculiar style of intense and comprehensive imagery which distinguishes the modern literature of England'; something in the air, which is shared by many writers, without any conscious mutual imitation. We now see, a century later, that this remark is true. Yet it is not so easy to define the element common to the styles, say, of Byron, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Landor. There is something which is absent in Tennyson and Rossetti. But it is not merely 'intense and comprehensive imagery,' which is in all great poets. What, then, is it? The old opposition between 'classical' and 'romantic,' between the manner of Landor and that of Coleridge, must be left behind and transcended to find the quality we are seeking.

This may be described as a certain directness, clarity, and strength, which give us a large, rapid impression. There is little desire, except in Keats and his companions, to dally with language, to pause and taste it, to hunt for felicities, to be strange and arresting and curious. When Wordsworth and Shelley revise their verse, it is in order to simplify it, and to keep the large rapid impression undisturbed. They refuse to linger or to hurry; they will not fret and torture language. Read *Lancelot and Elaine*, and *The Stream's Secret*, and the odes of Coventry Patmore; then turn back to *Achilles and Helena*, and *Alastor*, and *Dejection*, and *Cain*; and you will breathe more freely, you will feel the same sort of relief as in going back to a page of De Quincey or Hazlitt from a page of Walter Pater or Robert Louis Stevenson. This large rapid impression is one of the gifts of the romantic writers; and it allies them with the antique. Shelley produces it in a supreme degree. In his best writing it is associated with the essential flame and purity of his language, just as in Wordsworth's best writing it is associated with the poet's dignity of character and steady continuity of purpose.

The variety of Shelley's poetic style is great. In a poem like the *Hymn of Pan* or *The Question* it can be called romantic, in the more special

sense ; it is rich, and joyous, and full of colours and odours and liquid bird-notes, approaching in character to the style of Keats :

> The wind in the reeds and the rushes,
> The bees on the bells of thyme,
> The birds on the myrtle-bushes,
> The cicale above in the lime,
> And the lizards below in the grass,
> Were as silent as ever old Tmolus was,
> Listening to my sweet pipings.

There is much of this in Shelley, and it is always delightful ; his favourite visions of a refuge, green and scented and solitary, from the bitterness of the world of men, are full of such imagery. But this is not his highest, or perhaps his most characteristic, language ; of which the marks are purity and magnificence, and sometimes austerity. The purity and magnificence, without the austerity, are felt in the stanza from *The Revolt of Islam* :

> What then was I ? She slumbered with the dead.
> Glory and joy and peace, had come and gone.
> Doth the cloud perish, when the beams are fled
> Which steeped its skirts in gold ? Or dark and lone,
> Doth it not thro' the paths of night unknown,
> On outspread wings of its own wind upborne,

Pour rain upon the earth ? The stars are
shewn,
When the cold moon sharpens her silver horn
Under the sea, and make the wide night not
forlorn.

Not many styles, it may be felt, are greater than this one ; any poet in the world might be proud of it. Nor need we pit any other against it, least of all anything of Shelley's own. But in some of the speeches of his *Prometheus* there is superadded the austerity, which does not mean bareness, that Æschylus had taught him ; and here again he takes his place with the greatest :

Peace is in the grave.
The grave hides all things beautiful and good :
I am a God and cannot find it there,
Nor would I seek it ; for, though dread revenge,
This is defeat, fierce king, not victory.
The sights with which thou torturest gird my soul
With new endurance, till the hour arrives
When they shall be no types of things that are.
Panthea. Alas, what sawest thou ?
Prometheus. There are two woes,
To speak, and to behold ; thou, spare me one.

This, no doubt, is not Shelley's usual speech ; he requires, to command it, the coercion of a great subject and perhaps of a great literary model. Ordinarily his language is less clear outline ; it is poured out and lavished, and has the qualities

now of flickering fire and now of rushing water. But in mere vocabulary and phrase it is almost unsurpassably pure, and a note on some of its constituents may close this essay.

His diction may be called, like Wordsworth's, central or classical; and it is also his own. It seldom aims at strangeness, and it shows none of that anxious tasting and adoption of Elizabethan forms which Leigh Hunt taught to Keats. Traces of Shelley's reading of Shakespeare and Milton may easily be found; but they do not bulk large and they tend to disappear. He does not distil the older poets after the manner of Tennyson, or care, like Browning, for free bold coinages. A word like 'hupaithric' is rarely found in Shelley. Certain types of compound he may be said to adore, but he makes them in quite a regular way, and such inventions of Keats as 'proud-quivered' and 'branch-charmed' would have offended his instinct. He is rich in words compounded with 'sea-' and 'tempest-,' and especially with 'all-' ('all-miscreative'). He is sparing, unlike Rossetti, in the deliberate use of long single words, though he likes them when they give him some large elemental image, such as 'tempestuous' or 'adamantine.' 'Eternity' and 'Omnipotence' come frequently in his anti-theological poems. Some classes of abstract words abound; indeed

the opinions and sensibilities of Shelley are very fully reflected in the concordance to his poems. It is natural that he should have such favourites as 'custom,' 'free,' 'slave,' 'hope,' 'just,' with their derivatives, in one class; and in another, as 'agony,' 'pain,' 'torture,' and 'hate'; with their opposites 'joy,' 'delight,' 'gentleness,' 'mildness.' He is over-fond of words that, in their abuse or excessive use, may be called hectic, such as 'demon,' 'curse,' 'mad,' 'poison,' and 'blood.' This streak of the romantic novel of terror he never quite lost.

No poet is richer in terms descriptive of the elements and their attributes. Those which communicate the pleasure given by light are abundant; if we look down a page, it is likely enough to be studded with 'bright,' 'beam,' 'fire,' 'flame,' 'gleam,' 'radiance,' and the like; and, to a less degree, with 'gloom' and 'darkness.' There are endless 'chasms,' 'caves,' 'gulphs,' and 'abysses.' But he is more at home than anyone in the upper air; expressions like 'airy,' 'atmosphere,' 'cloud,' 'wind,' 'blast,' and 'rain' are for ever on his lips. Like Dante, he is much with the 'sun' and the 'stars.' It may be noticed, however, that he is richer in epithets that convey sensations, than in those that represent things. Shelley's birds and beasts would fill

but a small cage. His singers are the earth, and spirits, and voices of phantasms, rather than the nightingale ; though, of course, he has his skylark. He often speaks of odours, and is profuse in adjectives like 'dim' and 'faint' and 'keen,' or substantives like 'trance' and 'Elysium.' Yet there is a certain sharpness of pleasure, which easily becomes pain, in his very languors ; and he does not, like Keats, 'fade far away, and quite forget.' It would be easy to carry this sort of analysis further. 17823

The power and charm of Shelley could only be rightly expressed in figured speech like his own ; and to describe a portion of his nature we have to fall back on the lines in *Adonais*, where he calls himself 'a dying lamp, a falling shower, a breaking billow.' But even this is only half a description ; it does not tell us that Shelley and his poetry are also like a beacon, or a fruitful rain, or a radiant sea. If we apply to himself what he says of the West Wind, we are nearer to the impression that he gives ; nor can we take better leave of him than in the words of the only poet who can be thought to have earned, soon after his departure, a place in the same sphere of the lyrical heavens, Thomas Lovell Beddoes :

What would he not have done, if ten years more, that will be wasted upon the lives of

unprofitable knaves and fools, had been given to him ? Was it that more of the beautiful and good, than Nature could spare to one, was incarnate in him, and that it was necessary to rescue it for distribution through the external and internal worlds ? How many springs will blossom with his thoughts—how many fair and glorious creations be born of his one extinction !

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

(*Dates are of publication unless otherwise noted.*)

1792. Aug. 4. Percy Bysshe Shelley born at Field Place, Horsham, Sussex, eldest child of Timothy Shelley, a Tory country gentleman of old family, and of his wife Elizabeth, born Pilfold.

1804. To Eton. For Shelley's vow in boyhood to devote himself to the service of goodness and beauty, see *Revolt of Islam*, dedication, and *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, verse vi.

1810. *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*, juvenile romances.

1810. At University College, Oxford ; friendship with Thomas Jefferson Hogg.

1811. Pamphlet, *The Necessity of Atheism.*

1811. March, expulsion from Oxford. Aug., marriage to Harriet Westbrook.

1811-1813. Wanderings in north of England, Ireland, Devon, and Wales. Correspondence and acquaintance with William Godwin.

1812. *Address to the Irish People*, and other pamphlets.

1813. *Queen Mab.*

1814. May, meeting with Mary Godwin (1797-1851). Breach with Harriet. July, Shelley and Mary leave for France and Switzerland ; and return (Sept.).

1814. 'Away, the moor is dark beneath the moon,' written.

1815. Death of grandfather, Sir Bysshe ; Shelley financially independent ; at Bishopsgate.

1816. *Alastor, or, The Spirit of Solitude.*

1816. Shelley and Mary at Sécheron, near Geneva; acquaintance with Byron. Sept., back in England. Nov., suicide of Harriet Shelley. Dec., marriage of Shelley and Mary.

1817. Deprived, by Lord Eldon's judgment, of charge of his children by Harriet. Acquaintance with Keats; stay of a year at Marlow. Friendship with Thomas Love Peacock.

1817. *Laon and Cythna*, also Keats's *Endymion*, written. *Prince Athanase* written. Mary's tale, *Frankenstein*, published.

1818. March, the Shelleys leave England for Italy; 1818-1821, visit Venice, Naples, Rome, Florence, Pisa, etc. Renewed acquaintance with Byron.

1818. *Revolt of Islam* (this is *Laon and Cythna* altered). *Julian and Maddalo* written. Plato's *Banquet* translated, at Lucca. *Rosalind and Helen* finished.

1819. Shelley's great period of production begins. *Rosalind and Helen*, with *Lines Written among the Euganean Hills*, and *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty. Prometheus Unbound* and *The Cenci* completed. *Ode to the West Wind*, and *A Philosophical View of Reform*, written. *Cyclops* of Euripides translated. *Peter Bell the Third* and *The Mask of Anarchy* written.

1820. *Prometheus Unbound* (with *The Sensitive Plant, A Vision of the Sea, Ode to the West Wind, The Cloud, To a Skylark*, etc.). *The Cenci. The Witch of Atlas* written.

1821. Pisa: acquaintance with Emilia Viviani. Death of Keats at Rome, Feb. 23. Companionship with Byron and Edward John Trelawny. Project of Shelley and Byron for Leigh Hunt to edit *The Liberal*, published at Pisa, 1922-3.

1821. *Epipsychidion, Adonais. A Defence of Poetry* written. *Charles the First* begun. Many lyrics.

1822. *Hellas, Triumph of Life* written, and translations from Calderon and Goethe's *Faust.*

1822. At Casa Magni, on the Bay of Spezzia. July 8, Shelley and Edward Williams sail from Leghorn in the *Ariel* (otherwise the *Don Juan*) and are drowned. Aug. 15 and 16, burning of the recovered bodies on the shore of Via Reggio, by Trelawny, Byron, and Leigh Hunt. Shelley's ashes buried in the old Protestant cemetery, Rome.

1824, 1839. Editions of poems, including many posthumous ones.

1851. Death of Mary Shelley.

NOTES

i. *Biography.* E. Dowden, *Life of Shelley*, 2 vols., 1886. The *Letters*, ed. R. Ingpen, 2 vols., 1909, are essential. Amongst earlier sources are T. L. Peacock, *Memoirs of Shelley*, ed. H. F. B. Brett-Smith, 1909; and T. J. Hogg, *Shelley at Oxford*, ed. R. A. Streatfield, 1904; and the *Letters and Journals of Byron*, ed. R. E. Prothero, 6 vols., 1898-1901, throw much light. H. S. Salt's *Shelley Primer*, 1887, is very useful. The most recent study of note is Mrs. O. W. Campbell's *Shelley and the Unromantics*, 1923. See too A. Koszul, *La Jeunesse de Shelley*, 1910.

ii. *Writings.* The entire edition is H. Buxton Forman's, 8 vols. (four verse and four prose), 1876-1880. The completest editions of the *Poetical Works* are those by C. D. Locock, 2 vols., 1911, and by Thomas Hutchinson, 1904; and there are those by W. M. Rossetti, 3 vols., 1878, and by E. Dowden, 1890. Stopford A. Brooke's *Selections* (Golden Treasury) should be named. The Shelley Society has reprinted in facsimile many important poems. *Defence of Poetry*, ed. H. F. B. Brett-Smith, with Peacock's *Four Ages of Poetry* (Percy Reprints, Oxford). F. S. Ellis's *Lexical Concordance* (to the poetry), 1892.

iii. *Comment.* Out of the multitude of critics may be chosen: W. Bagehot, in his *Literary Studies;* Swinburne, on the text, in his *Essays and Studies*, 1875; A. Clutton Brock, *Shelley, the Man and the Poet*, 1909; A. C. Bradley, *Shelley's View of Poetry*, in his *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, 1909; and Archibald B. Strong, *Three Studies in Shelley*, 1921. On versification, see G. Saintsbury, *History of English Prosody*, vol. iii, 1910.

p. 19. *Alastor, Or the Spirit of Solitude.* The word *Or* defines 'Alastor,' which means primarily (Liddell and Scott) 'avenging deity, destroying angel'; though it can also mean 'he who suffers from such vengeance, a polluted or accursed wretch." The former sense is intended by Shelley; his friend Peacock says: 'the poem treated the spirit of Solitude as the spirit of evil.' Alastor, then, is this spirit, and is not the hero of the poem, who is that spirit's victim.

p. 29. Edward John Trelawny's *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron*, 1858 (reprint, ed. Dowden, 1906), is more trustworthy than in its augmented form, *Records of Byron, Shelley, and the Author*, 1878.

p. 52. *Epipsychidion.* A word coined by Shelley, an endearing diminutive of the non-existent Greek word 'epipsyche'; it seems to mean 'a little soul upon, added to, or over, my soul'; this second, or consummating, soul being apparently that of Emilia Viviani.

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